

## President's Message...

Laurence Wee

### A New Vision Of Aging That Can Help You Live Longer

We are growing older, each and every one of us here. And there can be no denial of this irrefutable and ever-present fact, whatever our beliefs and thoughts about life.

Although the aging process is experienced across nations and countries, among the peoples throughout the world, how the different respective cultures respond to this reality must surely vary widely. The crux of this matter is all about mindset.

For many of us in the industrialized world today, our aging journey generally is a source of anxiety and grief. Our perception of the elderly population is for the most part, an increasingly senile, frail, and unhappy segment of people. We therefore fear aging. Instead of looking forward to our golden years, we dread each passing birthday. Instead of a vision of our later years as a time of growth, harvest, and maturity, we entertain the fear of the gradual deterioration of our health which will so greatly impair our lives that to live a long life might be more of a curse than a blessing.

When we think of being old, our images are often invariably one of decrepitude and despair. It seems more realistic to imagine ourselves languishing in nursing homes than to picture ourselves swimming, gardening, laughing with loved ones, and delighting in grand children and nature. To have negative stereotypes about aging is insidious. Negative images not only lead to compromised health and shortened lives, but are also devastating in the present. People with negative perceptions of aging are more likely to consider their lives to be worthless, empty and hopeless while those with more positive perceptions of aging were more likely to view their lives as fulfilling and hopeful.

It is extremely important for us today to replace the prevailing negative mindset of aging with a new vision - one which grasps the possibility of living all the days of our lives with exuberance and a passion for life.

Today, there are few things of greater consequences than to bring our lives into alignment with our true potential for health and our dreams for a better tomorrow. The key to it is to do the best you can with what you have got. Perhaps one may start with simply taking daily walks or brisk walking, or taking an activity of interest like line-dancing class and so on. But more importantly, if we can arouse in ourselves an empathy and concern for the general well-being of older people in our midst, and to get involved in the helping process, we can derive a sense of satisfaction and even fulfillment. I personally feel very positive and good about having been a part of that.

In conclusion, I would like to ask all those working with the elderly, as food for thought, to carefully consider the following questions below, which hopefully, can help to shape the future policies that affect our older people and advocate for change.

*(Continue on pg 2)*

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Have the aging policies of the past two decades really benefitted the elders?

Can the perennial problems that go with aging in Singapore be alleviated?

If yes, what would it take to address them?

On behalf of all my Council Members at the Society, my sincere thanks and appreciation to various ministries and organisations including the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports, Health Promotion Board, Council for 3rd Age, Centre for Seniors, Gerontological Research Branch

NUS, Psychological Medicine Department NUHS, National Library Board, Lee Foundation, Presbyterian Community Services and everyone of you here for the warm support you have given us this past year. We do look forward to your continued partnership and support in working together so as to achieve...

*a gracious aging society.*

**Laurence Wee**  
**President**  
**Gerontological Society**  
**23 August 2008**

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## **Message by Mr Heng Chee How @ AGM 2008**

*Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office*

**F**irst of all, I would like to thank the Gerontological Society, especially Professor Kalyani Mehta, for inviting me to this important occasion. I am honoured to share my thoughts on ageing with this expert audience.

My speech will cover three areas. Firstly, what does ageing mean for Singapore? Secondly, what has the Government done to prepare for ageing? Thirdly, what else needs to be done?

At the risk of giving away the punch line, I would like to suggest that the saying "Prevention is Better than Cure" fits very well with what more needs to be done.

What do I mean?

### **Ageing Trend in Singapore**

Let me start off by saying that population ageing is a fundamental and pervasive trend. It affects Singapore at all levels – as a nation, communities, families, and individuals. All of us know family and friends who require care or have passed on in their old age. I am sure that most of us have thought seriously about how we want to grow old.

In itself, ageing is neither a blessing nor a curse. We are becoming "first world" in our demographics largely because of our economic success. Since independence, our life expectancy has increased 11 years to around 84 years – on par with the developed world.

But unless we suddenly have more babies, we will also have less time to prepare for ageing than the West. In another decade, the proportion of our population aged 65 and above will equal Europe of today. In two decades, we would have caught up with Japan of today. By then, one of five of us will be 65 and above.

### **Challenges of Ageing**

The challenges of population ageing are well-documented. In Europe and Japan, the costs of pensions, healthcare and long-term care are mounting and presents a potential drain on the resources of future generations. Their governments have accepted the need to encourage people to work and rein in spending. These changes are however neither easy for the government to implement, nor for their electorate to accept.



Singapore does not need to face this scenario in 2030. We have the benefit of hindsight. If we do the right things at the government, community and even the individual level, we can avoid the worst of these pressures. Prevention is better than cure, and I will elaborate on this point later.

### **Ageing as an Opportunity**

There can even be a silver lining. Over the next few decades, the whole world will be ageing rapidly; 1.2 billion people in Asia will be above 60 in 2050. Many baby boomers, unlike their parents, will remain active in the economy and society. They are a resource and a market.

In summary, population ageing poses both challenges and opportunities. Ageing has a long "tail". What we do today determines what happens in 2020.

## Government Initiatives

So what has the Government done so far?

Today, there is a Ministerial Committee on Ageing that is chaired by Minister Lim Boon Heng. This is not the first government committee looking at ageing. The first was in fact established in 1982, under the late Mr Howe Yoon Chong. Changes in our healthcare, CPF and housing policies reflect the work of these committees. The GSS, which was set up in 1986, would no doubt be familiar with what the government has been doing.

Let me highlight a few recent examples.

To enhance financial security, the Government recently announced the introduction of CPF Life and other related reforms to the CPF. This comes on top of our 3Ms framework for healthcare as well as EldersShield.

To enable people to work longer, we are encouraging employers to introduce re-employment practices and will introduce legislation on this in 2012. There are measures to re-design jobs and re-skill workers. So far, 19 training centers have been set up under WDA's Continuing Education and Training framework, covering 12 key industries.

To encourage ageing-in-place, the Government is committed to make our housing estates "barrier-free" by 2011. Studio Apartments have been introduced as a type of HDB housing. HDB policies also encourage families to live near to each other or together.

### More needs to be done

There are many other examples. But this is not by any means "Job Done". In each of these areas, our policies must evolve and improve.

For example, how can we help women to better manage their work and caregiving responsibilities?

How should our housing be organized so as to promote independent living, social engagement and at the same time provide the necessary care and support?

How can we better prevent, identify and treat dementia and depression?

How do we promote the love for lifelong learning?

As outlined by Minister Lim earlier this year, our vision is for Singaporeans to lead happy, healthy and active lives in their golden years. Singaporeans should be active physically, mentally, socially and economically, for as long as they can.

How about those today who need to be cared for? We will seek to ensure that care is affordable, accessible and adequate.

## Guiding Policy Principles

To do this, we will be guided by the following principles:

Firstly, the family should be the first line of care and support for the elderly. Overseas experience tells us that a state-dominated system of care is fiscally unsustainable. But we also recognize that the family as an institution is dynamic. Singaporean families are becoming smaller and dispersed globally. More seniors are single or living alone.

But even in the West, family members remain an important provider of care. In a study on informal care in Europe, the family provides 83% of all informal care for elderly single parents. In Singapore, we should support the family as the main caregiver. This can be in the form of more respite care options, caregiver training and a better information and referral system to services.

Secondly, care for the elderly should be provided at lowest cost to society. For example, the elderly should live in the community for as long as possible and avoid premature institutionalization. This approach also applies to the poor and vulnerable elderly who have no family support. Taking a "Many Helping Hands" approach, we should ensure that the poor and elderly can live in the community.

The final principle that guides our policies is to take a preventive approach. I mentioned this at the outset, and will spend a little more time to develop this thought.

### Promoting Health and Preventive Care

Over the past three months, I have visited Netherlands, Finland and Japan to learn about their experiences on ageing. All these countries have somewhat different systems and background. But what is common is their efforts to emphasize preventive care and health promotion. They are doing this to reduce health and long-term care costs.

You may have heard that Japanese companies are now mandated by law to conduct waist measurements and other checks on their employees aged above 40. Those failing the test will be given counseled to lose weight. The Japanese are especially concerned about their men, where as many as half either have metabolic syndrome or on the way to having it.

### Physical Activity as Natural Remedy

It is good to remind ourselves that physical activity is the natural remedy to many health problems. During a recent conference in Japan which I attended, a Canadian expert suggested that physical activity is the best non-pharmaceutical cure for chronic diseases. We also know that regular physical activity can reduce the risk of developing heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and colon cancer. It promotes

social bonds and can even reduce anxiety and depression.

Knowing is one thing. But encouraging sedentary people to be active is the challenging part. Today, only a quarter of Singaporeans are physically active. We should move closer to the levels of Finland and the Netherlands, where half of the population is physically active.

### Ways to Encourage Physical Activity

It is clear that several pieces would need to be in place for people to be physically active. For instance, the environment must be conducive for people to want to commute by foot or bicycle, exercise, brisk walk, or even do some gardening. Opportunities to take up different exercises or sports should be convenient and affordable.

These are supply side measures. But the demand or desire to be physically active also needs to be developed. How do we persuade people on the value of physical activity? Is it health, vanity, desire for independence, or because it's the "in-thing" to do? When that desire is aroused, how do we capitalize on it to ensure behavior change? What role can the community play to promote physical activity?

Several initiatives have been launched to encourage an active lifestyle among seniors. I will give you two examples.

Last year, the government launched the first pilot under the Wellness Programme at Jurong Central. By the end of this year, we will see 12 constituencies piloting this programme.

The objective of the Wellness Programme is to help older adults lead active lifestyles and better manage their own health. Each Wellness Programme has full-time co-ordinators, who will work closely with the Advisor and grassroots to ensure that there are programmes and activities to promote "active ageing" and social bonding.

Also last year, the Council for Third Age chaired by Mr Gerard Ee was formed to promote active ageing. On behalf of MCYS, the Council administers the Golden Opportunities (GO!) Fund and will organize events such as the Active Ageing Festival and Grandparents' Day. Its partners are wide-ranging, including, I believe, the Gerontological Society.

### Conclusion

This brings me to my final point.

Population ageing affects us all. Similarly, I believe that achieving successful ageing will require close partnership among all of us. While the government holds key policy levers, the community must be involved to receive and look out for their seniors. Families have an important role in caring for their elderly. At the personal level, all of us need to take care of our own health, be active and keep up with the world.

I wish you all the best and I look forward to the continued efforts and contributions from Gerontological Society in meeting the challenges of population ageing in Singapore.

Thank you. 

## GS AGM 23 Aug 2008 at York Hotel



# Dignity and Grace of Ageing - a public forum held on 19 Jul 2008

by Henry Lim, Hon Advisor

It is never too late, nor too early, to make changes to enable us to grow old with Dignity and Grace.


At 83, I find myself just as healthy and fit as I was twenty years ago and I earnestly believe that attitude makes all the difference in how one lives life. Frankly, I believe that God is giving me the opportunity to complete my long delayed pilgrimage of faith and personal reflections and to also find the religious truth for my maturity years. Yes, I have indeed embarked on an extended journey which I consider a gift from God for which I shall embrace each day as a special gift to be treasured.

To all my dear friends who have taken time to read my message, I have the following to share: "As we get older, our vision should improve. Not our vision of earth, but our vision of heaven. There is a loftier ambition than merely to stand high in the world. It is to stoop down and lift mankind a little higher."

As we age, we should create a need within us to examine our usefulness and to see how we can contribute to the betterment of society in the years to come.

In my case, the older I get, the more I realize how dependent I am on the love and support of

others. At one time in my life, I thought it was weakness to be dependent on other people, but I've come to see it very differently. At this juncture, words cannot convey my immense gratitude to people like Prof. Kua Ee Heok, Laurence Wee, Betty and Lionel Ong and many others whose steadfast support and encouragement have made it possible for me to grow old with dignity and grace.

To conclude, let us always remember that a person who forgets the language of gratitude can never be on speaking terms with HAPPINESS. 




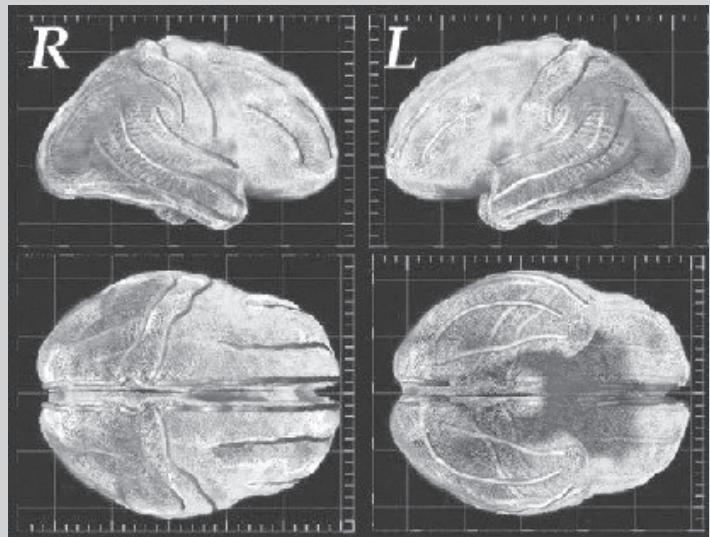
# Weblog de Fraga

By Ed Edelson

12 Nov 2008 -- A study using an advanced brain scanning technology supports the growing body of evidence that education levels and some form of intellectual activity decrease the impact of Alzheimer's disease.

People with a greater "cognitive reserve" suffer less damage from the beta-amyloid plaques in the brain that are a leading marker of Alzheimer's disease, according to the study in the November issue of the Archives of Neurology.

Cognitive reserve is the concept that "the way that some people process information, the brain networks they use, allows them to cope better," said study author Catherine M. Roe, a research instructor in neurology at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis. 



Courtesy of Weblog de Fraga:

<http://weblogofraga.blogspot.com/>

*The Gerontological Society's  
President and Council members*

*wishes all members*

**A Happy 2009!**

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**Editorial Board:**

Ms Diana Koh, Mr Laurence Wee,  
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